

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 EURE-00 PM-04 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15
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P R 041828Z JAN 77
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8458
INFO AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY VALLETTA PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY ROME
USMISSION NATO
USMISSION EC BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, FR, MT, US
SUBJ: FRENCH APPROACH ON MALTA

REFS: A. STATE 313031. B. PARIS 23967.

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: QUAI DEPUTY DIRECTOR MEDITERRANEAN
AFFAIRS BLOT HAS APPROACHED US WITH REQUEST FOR US
COMMENTS AND REACTIONS TO IDEAS QUAI IS CONSIDERING
WITH RESPECT TO MALTA, BEFORE OFFICIAL POSITIONS
FORMALLY SET. END SUMMARY.

2. BLOT CONFIRMS THAT MALTA SENT TREATY PROPOSAL
GUARANTEEING ITS SECURITY AND ECONOMIC VIABILITY TO
COUNTRIES LISTED REFTEL A. THE NINE HAVE DISCUSSED
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THIS PROPOSAL AND HAVE INFORMALLY AGREED THAT ITALY
AND REPEAT AND FRANCE, THE COMMUNITY'S TWO MEDITERRAN-
EAN MEMBERS, SHOULD HAVE THE PRINCIPAL ACTION ROLE
THIS FIELD.

3. QUAI HAS ACCORDINGLY BEEN INVOLVED IN INTENSIVE
INTERNAL DISCUSSION; HAS HAD SOME TENTATIVE EXCHANGES

WITH ITALIANS; AND HOPES THAT A GENERALLY AGREED POLICY APPROACH TO MINTOFF MIGHT BE DEVELOPED, PERHAPS BY EARLY FEBRUARY, WHEN NOT ONLY THE NEW US ADMINISTRATION WILL HAVE BEEN INSTALLED, BUT WHEN THE NEW FRENCH AMBASSADOR TO MALTA, GELADE, WILL HAVE ARRIVED AND CAN COMMENCE FRENCH PART OF DIALOGUE WITH MINTOFF. SUCH AN EARLY START WOULD MAKE MAXIMUM USE OF TIME AVAILABLE BEFORE UK DEPARTURE.

4. QUAI THINKING STARTS FROM PREMISE THAT MALTESE "NEUTRALITY" IS PROBABLY THE BEST STATUS WEST CAN HOPE TO ACHIEVE. MOST IMPORTANTLY, IT WOULD KEEP SOVIET NAVY OUT. IT COULD ALSO HELP KEEP MALTESE RELATIONS WITH LIBYA WITHIN CONSTRUCTIVE BOUNDS. AND IT NEED NOT INTERFERE WITH ESSENTIAL WESTERN, INCLUDING US, STRATEGIC INTERESTS, INCLUDING RIGHT OF FREE PASSAGE OF WARSHIPS IN MALTESE TERRITORIAL WATERS.

5. TO REACH SUCH POLITICAL UNDERSTANDING, HOWEVER, QUAI BELIEVES MINTOFF'S "PRIMARY INTERLOCUTORS" SHOULD BE LIMITED TO MEDITERRANEAN COUNTRIES DIRECTLY INTERESTED IN THIS AREA. THIS CONFORMS, IN FIRST INSTANCE, TO COMMUNITY'S PREFERENCE TO DEFER TO FRANCE AND ITALY IN THIS MATTER AND TO FRANCE'S TRADITIONAL DESIRE TO PLAY GREATER MEDITERRANEAN ROLE. IN ADDITION, HOWEVER, QUAI IS CONSIDERING IDEA OF INCLUDING LIBYANS AND ALGERIANS IN THIS "FRONT-LINE" GROUP, IN ORDER TO GIVE LIBYANS, IN PARTICULAR, GREATER FEELING OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR MALTESE NEUTRALITY (AND UNDOUBTEDLY
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A SHARE OF ECONOMIC BURDEN).

6. QUAI EMPHASIZES, HOWEVER, THAT ALL ASPECTS OF THE NITTY-GRITTY OF SUCH AN EXERCISE IS STILL UP FOR GRABS. AMONG POSSIBLE SCENARIOS, BLOT BELIEVES, MOST PRACTICAL MIGHT BE ONE LEADING TO A UNILATERAL MALTESE DECLARATION OF NEUTRALITY WHICH, UNLIKE A TREATY-SYSTEM, WOULD NOT INVOLVE FORMAL GUARANTEES BY THE OTHER FRONT-LINE COUNTRIES. THIS WOULD ENABLE FRANCE TO AVOID SECURITY RESPONSIBILITY FOR MALTA'S NEUTRAL STATUS AND WOULD NOT INVOLVE CREATION OF A NEW POLITICAL "SYSTEM" CENTERED ON MALTA. AT SAME TIME, BLOT SAID, QUAI COULD ENVISAGE A "KEY ROLE" FOR "FRONT-LINE" COUNTRIES "IN DEALING POLITICALLY" WITH ANY QUESTIONS OR COMPLAINTS THAT MIGHT ARISE AS TO MALTA'S NEUTRALITY.

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7. QUAI IS ALSO QUITE OPEN-MINDED AND INTERESTED IN SUGGESTIONS AS TO CONTENT WHICH CONCEPT OF "NEUTRALITY" SHOULD HAVE IN MALTESE CASE, IN ORDER TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT LEGITIMATE NEEDS AND SECURITY INTERESTS OF OTHER ALLIES, SUCH AS THE US. FOR INSTANCE, BLOT DID NOT EXCLUDE POSSIBILITY THAT SUCH A UNILATERAL DECLARATION MIGHT BE BASED ON AN EXCHANGE OF LESS FORMAL MEMORANDA DEFINING THE COMMITMENT MORE PRECISELY, ALTHOUGH THERE MIGHT ALSO BE OTHER METHODS OF REACHING A GENERALLY SATISFACTORY UNDERSTANDING.

8. CENTRAL TO QUAI'S CONCEPTION OF SUCH AN APPROACH TO MINTOFF, HOWEVER, WOULD BE A CLEAR SEPARATION OF THE POLITICAL FROM ECONOMIC QUESTIONS. MINTOFF WOULD BE
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TOLD FIRMLY, FROM OUTSET THAT, WHILE POLITICAL AND

ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF PROBLEM COULD BE DEALT WITH SIMULTANEOUSLY, THEY MUST REMAIN STRICTLY SEPARATED SUBJECTS. BLOT COMMENTS THAT "FRONT-LINE COUNTRIES" OBVIOUSLY COULD NOT THEMSELVES UNDERTAKE FULL ECONOMIC RESPONSIBILITY FOR MALTESE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (IMPLICATION BEING THAT REST OF NINE NOT LIKELY TO BE VERY HELPFUL). NOR SHOULD NATO CONTINUE TO FIGURE AS THE PRINCIPAL ECONOMIC INTERLOCUTOR. QUAI THEREFORE WANTS TO TELL MINTOFF SIMPLY THAT MALTA WOULD BE VIEWED HENCEFORTH AS A "DEVELOPING COUNTRY," WHOSE ECONOMIC NEEDS SHOULD CONCERN MUCH WIDER RANGE OF INTERESTED STATES, EVEN INCLUDING SUCH DISTANT ONES AS JAPAN. QUAI HAS NO ILLUSIONS THAT SUCH A BROADER APPROACH WOULD NOT PREVENT MINTOFF FROM RELATING POLITICAL CONCESSIONS TO ECONOMIC CONDITIONS. HOWEVER, THE FACT THAT THE "FRONT-LINE" INTERLOCUTORS WOULD ONLY BE THE SPOKESMEN FOR SUCH SUBSTANTIALLY LARGER CIRCLE OF POTENTIAL AID CONTRIBUTORS ON ECONOMIC SIDE, SHOULD EASE NEGOTIATING TASK.

9. BLOT EMPHASIZED REPEATEDLY THAT ALL THIS IS STILL IN STAGE OF INTERNAL QUAI DELIBERATION. IN APPROACHING EMBASSY NOW QUAI'S IMMEDIATE CONCERN IS TO KNOW:

(A) WHETHER, AND TO WHAT EXTENT, SUCH A SCENARIO MIGHT MEET WITH WASHINGTON'S APPROVAL, WHICH QUAI BELIEVES IS ESSENTIAL TO SUCCESS; AND

(B) WHETHER, IN PRINCIPLE, THE US WOULD BE PREPARED TO CONTINUE TO MAKE ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTIONS TO A "NEUTRAL" MALTA AS PART OF WIDER GROUPING OF INTERESTED STATES, IF POLITICAL NEGOTIATIONS SHOULD REACH A SATISFACTORY RESULT, SINCE QUAI FEARS, THAT WITHOUT AT LEAST A GENERAL UNDERSTANDING OF US SUPPORT, ENTIRE EXERCISE MIGHT BE NON-STARTER.

10. BLOT RECOGNIZES THAT PRESENT IS PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT

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CULT PERIOD TO POSE SUCH QUESTIONS TO WASHINGTON, BUT HOPED DEPARTMENT WOULD BE ABLE TO PROVIDE AT LEAST INTERIM ANSWER NOW AND MORE DEFINITIVE REPLY BY EARLY FEBRUARY.

11. BEGIN COMMENT: QUAI SCENARIO IS, OF COURSE, MOSTLY SELF-SERVING, SINCE IT WOULD ENHANCE FRANCE'S MEDITERRANEAN ROLE WHILE SPREADING THE ECONOMIC LOAD AROUND MUCH LARGER CIRCLE. ON OTHER HAND, FRENCH APPROACH CLOSELY PARALLELS, AT LEAST IN ITS ESSENTIALS, CERTAIN, BUT NOT ALL OF KEY ELEMENTS DEPARTMENT'S THINKING (PARA 5 REFTEL A). THUS CONTACT WORK WOULD BE DONE BY EUROPEANS, SPECIFICALLY BY REGIONAL STATES AS

MINTOFF HOPES. NATO ROLE WOULD BE DIMINISHED. CONCEPTION OF BRINGING IN LIBYANS AND ALGERIANS, AND PERHAPS TUNISIANS, COULD INDEED HAVE CERTAIN SALUTARY LONG-TERM EFFECTS, PARTICULARLY IN CHANNELING MALTESE-LIBYAN RELATIONS. AND, SPECIFIC US AND NATO REQUIREMENTS, COULD BECOME SUBJECT OF SPECIFIC NEGOTIATION THROUGH FRENCH AND ITALIANS.

12. MUCH LESS POSITIVE, IT SEEMS TO US, IS QUAI CONVICTION THAT SOME SORT OF PRIOR US ASSURANCE THAT WE WOULD BE PREPARED TO CONTINUE TO GIVE MALTA "DEVELOPMENT AID," IS ESSENTIAL TO A SUCCESSFUL INITIAL APPROACH TO MINTOFF; PARTICULARLY SINCE, AS REFTEL A POINTS OUT, THIS WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY ONLY LEAD MINTOFF TO RAISE ANTE.

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CONVERSELY, FRENCH ARE OBVIOUSLY, AND PERHAPS WISELY CONCERNED ABOUT PROBLEM OF FINDING A CREDIBLE FORMULA WHICH, FROM OUTSET, WOULD FIX PROBLEM OF MALTA'S ECONOMIC NEEDS ON LARGER INTERNATIONAL BODY THAN

"FRONT-LINE" COUNTRIES, WHO, WITH POSSIBLE EXCEPTION OF LIBYA, ARE IN TIGHT ECONOMIC STRAITS.

13. ON ANOTHER POINT, QUAI PROBABLY SHOWS REALISM IN BELIEVING THAT SUCH MALTESE DECLARATION OF "NEUTRALITY" WOULD NOT END AND WOULD, ON CONTRARY, PROBABLY ONLY FURTHER STIMULATE MINTOFF'S CAMPAIGN FOR MAKING THE MEDITERRANEAN A "LAKE OF PEACE." END COMMENT.

14. RECOMMENDATION: IN REPLYING TO QUAI WE ARE PREPARED TO FOLLOW BROAD GUIDANCE IN REFTEL A, PARAS 5 AND SECRET

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6, RECEIVED JUST AFTER ABOVE CONVERSATION TOOK PLACE. HOWEVER, IN VIEW OF FRENCH WILLINGNESS TO CONSULT WITH US IN SOME DETAIL BEFORE FRENCH POSITIONS GELLED, WE BELIEVE IT WOULD BE MOST USEFUL NOT ONLY FOR QUAI RELATIONS NOW, BUT FOR LATER RELATIONSHIP WITH FRENCH AS THESE MALTESE NEGOTIATIONS DEVELOP--IF WE COULD OFFER ON STRICT BACKGROUND BASIS, MORE DETAILED COMMENTS AND REACTIONS TO VARIOUS ASPECTS OF ABOVE SCENARIO AS SOON AS PRACTICABLE.
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